



## 2010 WFCA Legislative Report

The Washington Fire Commissioners Association Legislative Committee met on November 12 and received an update that the state operating budget is estimated to have an additional \$2.6 billion revenue shortfall on the amount needed to fund current state programs. This will need to be addressed within the 2010 state supplemental budget. It should be noted that all Chelan Seminar legislative issues were reviewed by the Legislative Committee and after discussion, the top five issues were adopted for the 2010 session. Many issues will be reported with positions of support or opposition.

The legislature commences on Monday, January 11, 2010; Governor Gregoire and the legislature must balance the budget with additional cuts and/or elimination of state services, programs and reductions in assistance to local governments. There is now discussion of the possibility of tax increases to fund priority programs and services.

We know that the Governor has proposed consolidation or elimination of many boards and commissions. They include the following:

- Consolidation of the Board for Volunteer Firefighters and Reserve Police Officers (BVFFRP) pension and disability into the state Department of Retirement Systems (DRS).
- Elimination of the Fire Protection Policy Board.
- Elimination of the Emergency Medical Services and Trauma Care Committee.
- Elimination of the Emergency Medical Services Licensing and Certification Advisory Committee.

The WFCA has grave concerns with consolidation of the Board for Volunteer Firefighters and Reserve Police Officers. Our top concern is the fact that the BVFFRP provides both retirement and disability programs and DRS will contract out the disability portion of the program to Labor and Industries as DRS is not set up to administer disability payments. Also, we have concerns that the Board will be abolished and DRS will administer the program without volunteer firefighter input. This will be a top priority for the WFCA. More details will be sent out when the bill to eliminate boards and commissions is drafted.

The state Legislature and Governor are going to have to make some very difficult decisions while they analyze and debate throughout the budget process. Your WFCA lobbyists and I will be meeting with other local government associations to review proposals from the Governor, House and Senate and will keep you updated through legislative reports emailed every Friday beginning January 22.

### 2010 WFCA Priority Issues

- **Remove Super Majority (60%) Vote Requirement for Emergency Medical Services and Excess Property Tax Levies.** The WFCA supports legislation to amend the EMS levy statutes to provide for validation by a simple majority vote instead of the current 60%. The WFCA Legislative Committee will not move forward with a constitutional amendment for simple majority vote for excess levies because it would be very difficult to amend the constitution with a property tax proposal when the state is facing over a \$2.6 billion revenue shortfall.

- **Impact Fees for Fire Districts.** Support House Bill 1080 in which fire districts will be eligible to access impact fees for new construction located in the urban growth areas. We will also have a Senate companion bill introduced in the near future.
- **Volunteer Firefighter Incentives.** Due to the estimated \$2.6 billion state budget deficit, we do not believe it is the right time to ask the state for property tax credits, hunting and fishing licenses or to reduce car license tab fees for volunteer firefighters. However, this issue will continue to be advocated in discussions with legislative leadership. The WFCFA will support the establishment of a volunteer firefighter license plate and will introduce legislation to allow retired volunteer firefighters to continue to serve their communities without penalty to their retirement.
- **Volunteer Firefighter Enhancements.** The WFCFA continues to be an active participant in all discussions of volunteer firefighter enhancements and will be discussing with the Washington State Fire Fighters' Association possible legislative proposals to address the issue of license plates for volunteer firefighters.
- **Residential Fire Sprinklers.** WFCFA strongly supports the efforts of the fire sprinkler coalition and will oppose any legislation that may have a negative impact on the goal of residential sprinklers in new construction of single family dwellings. We have and will continue to support residential fire sprinklers.

The issues outlined below will be closely monitored when introduced in 2010:

- Monitor and take positions on all property tax proposals for cost impacts to fire districts. This will be a hot button issue as tax relief for property owners will be advocated by members of the legislature.
- State Agency Legislation. The WFCFA will monitor and take appropriate positions on all legislation from state agencies, such as:
  - Department of Health
  - Department of Natural Resources
  - State Auditor
  - State Patrol
  - Department of Revenue
  - State Treasurer
  - Insurance Commissioner
- Sunshine Legislation. The WFCFA will monitor and take appropriate positions on any amendments to the Open Public Records Act and/or Open Public Meetings Act. Some issues we have identified and oppose as adverse legislation include:
  - Public records/meetings notice through the government's website.
  - Erosion of protection of attorney/client privilege for local elected officials.
  - Mandatory recording of executive sessions.
- Health Care Reform. WFCFA is examining all proposals for cost impacts on fire districts and the WFCFA self-funded health care program.
- No Man's Land. The WFCFA will oppose any legislation that would mandate fire districts to provide protection outside the taxing district boundaries.